

Geothermal Green Team

There are a lot of ideas for green energy, and an Omaha-area company is putting one of those ideas into place

Geothermal Green Team is a 10-person engineering firm working out of a cramped office on the second floor of a warehouse in Gretna, Neb. They'll never feel comfortable in cubicles, and their meetings are out in the mud at a busy job site, with boots and work shirts instead of oxfords and ties. Glancing around their dimly-lit office with the dingy floor, wall decorated with a large white board, progress of jobs scrawled seemingly haphazardly, these guys seem at first unlikely to be on the cutting edge of renewable technology.

Here's how they end up saving their customers an average of 30 percent or more off their energy bills: Drilling several holes 500 feet into the near-constant 50-degree ground, the team stretches a length of polyethylene pipe from the structure to the surrounding soil and back. While a common air conditioner in the steamy Nebraska summer draws the fetid air inside to be cooled, the savings from geothermal is found circulating the cooler ground temperatures.



Tyler Volk (left) and Jay Hazlewood of Geothermal Green Team outside their Gretna, Neb. office.

"The winter is actually when you save the most," said Tyler Volk, the company's president, and a veteran of the U.S. Navy's nuclear power program. Instead of drawing in the icy cold air and asking a heat pump to warm it to a comfortable degree, "the ground source is just more efficient."

The team tackles residential jobs, larger commercial buildings, schools, hospitals, churches, and wherever there is a need to save energy costs with geothermal technology. They have been in business for the past two years following success as an independent subcontracting firm for a geothermal utility company.

Seeking to expand the business, Geothermal Green Team got a 7(a)-backed loan under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in July from the Bank of Nebraska to the tune of \$285,000 for a line of credit to meet payroll. Then, in October, they obtained another 7(a) loan for \$553,000 from Wells Fargo to purchase a new sonic drill.

The track-mounted sonic drill boasts a drill vibrating 180 times a second, “fluidizing,” according to Volk, anything from dirt, sand, gravel and rock, and shoving the polyethylene pipe deep into the ground.

This new rig, Volk explained, does jobs other drills don’t like to do.

“With this rig, we estimate to do a million and a half to two million a year in additional revenue,” Volk said. “If everything goes the way I plan it, we should be buying another sonic drill here by the end of the year. The work is there. We just gotta get more SBA loans.”

The new drill means more jobs for Geothermal Green Team, enough, Volk said, that the company expects to hire four or five more employees to help handle it.

Thanks to the help of the SBA, Geothermal Green Team is taking renewable energy ideas, using green technology to save energy costs and preserve natural resources.